

**Stoneleigh History Society**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2023**

1. Sheila welcomed every one to the meeting. There were 15 apologies received in advance, 19 members present plus 2 visitors.
2. Notices: Sheila reminded those present about the WLHS visit to Soho in Birmingham and asked that those interested should look online for details. There was a reminder also that at our November meeting, one of our members, Jill Kashi, will be giving a presentation on Cicely Neale, a leading local Suffragette.
3. Sheila introduced the speaker – Paul Waddoups – and invited him to give his presentation.

**The Kilsby Tunnel Murder Mystery 1906.**

Paul gave us some context to the story by showing 2 advertisements for tablets available in 1906 which were recommended for a number of ailments, including stress. He pointed out that at the time there was concern about people's well-being and train travel. He also told us about King Edward the 7<sup>th</sup> and his railway journeys. One of his lady friends lived not far from Banbury and the king would travel by train to visit. He was particularly taken by meat pies available from a shop in Banbury and would buy a couple to eat on his journey back to London! Paul told us of a family connection to the shop. Following the death on the railway, which he regularly used, the king became fascinated by the event.

The subject of the story was a young woman called Lillie Yolande Marie Rochaid who was travelling from her home in Dinard, Brittany to school in Princethorpe, Warwickshire. The school was St. Mary's Priory which was a well-known, highly regarded establishment, founded in 1832 by Benedictine sisters. Girls attended from all over the world and Lillie was, by all accounts, happy at the school and very fond of the Reverend Mother.

Lillie came from a wealthy family which had Syrian connections. Her parents were separated, and she lived in Dinard with her father. Lillie was a seasoned traveller and was about to start her second to last term at St. Mary's. She began her journey at St Malo, on to Southampton, train to Waterloo, across London to Euston and on to Marton, near Princethorpe. She had completed this journey on her own a number of times before and seemed happy to do so.

At this point Paul showed us a copy of 'Bradshaw's Guide' to railway travel. He quoted an excerpt which warned of the dangers to lady travellers. It gave advice including having a male companion or having a male place one safely in the carriage.

Lillie's journey took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1906. The train travelled through Northampton station, and it was noted that all doors were closed, however when it arrived at Rugby there was a carriage door open. Staff walked down the line and eventually found a mutilated body at the entrance to Kilsby tunnel. The head was crushed, and an arm and leg had been severed. Lillie had met her end in a very

violent fashion and yet her belongings were all found in the compartment she had been sitting in.

At the inquest there were a number of questions asked about the speed of the train, whether the carriage doors could be opened from outside and whether an assailant could have been on board the train but leave at Rugby without being seen. In the end the official verdict of the coroner was – ‘no evidence of foul play.’

The family were unhappy at the verdict and organised by Lillie’s uncle, further investigations were undertaken. Various flaws were identified in the way that local police had acted, and the case was handed to the CID in London. A number of apparent witnesses were located. Their observations varied widely i.e., Lillie appeared agitated, she was talkative, she was in good spirits, and she was agitated after speaking to a French woman at Victoria station. In addition Lillie’s mother alleged that Lillie became agitated when on trains.

A number of explanations were put forward:

In 1906 there was an increase in violence on trains, could Lillie have been the subject of a physical attack.

Freud developed a theory about the ‘fear of trains’.

Could she have got her clothing caught in the carriage door and opened the door to free it, only to fall out. This had happened to a Miss Simms, but she had survived.

Professor John Murton Collins ascribed it as a murder committed by Jack the Ripper.

N.B. Elizabeth Camp was a railway victim of the same.

Was a man lying in wait in the compartment ready to attack his victims. Could he have disguised himself as a woman or a nun.

The family were unable to find a satisfactory alternative explanation to the death of Lillie and her body was taken back to Dinard and buried in the family vault.

Paul concluded his presentation by asking the audience for their verdicts – Accident, Murder or Suicide. The majority view was that it was a tragic accident. As a staunch Catholic it is highly unlikely that Lillie would take her own life. Taking in to account the fact that all Lillie’s belongings were still untouched in the carriage there was little evidence of a criminal attack on her and so accident seems the obvious explanation.

4. Sheila thanked Paul for his highly entertaining presentation, and she invited questions from the audience.

N.B. Among the visitors was a former staff member of Princethorpe College; she said that the Archivist would be interested to share information with Paul. In 1966 the former building of St Mary’s became Princethorpe College for boys, in 1976 girls joined the 6<sup>th</sup> Form and in 1995 it became fully co-educational. In 2001 it merged with St. Joseph’s Convent in Kenilworth with St Joseph’s becoming the junior school.

5. The meeting closed at 21.00